VRM – BACKGROUND REPORT
Lee Anderson, Landscape Architect – April 17, 2003

3.3.1A.1 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (VRM) AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Map citation: VRM Map, showing Seen/Seldom Seen Areas, Focal Point Sensitivity and Recreation Sites. (see Maps 4 & 5)

The Fuels Pilot Project is situated in the congressionally designated Hellgate Recreational Section of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River and is managed for VRM Class I. The BLM Manual indicates that the objective of VRM Class I management *"is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. This class provides for natural, ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and should not attract attention."* The existing character to be preserved may be rural, agricultural, recreational, or even urban. It does not necessarily mean preservation of a naturalistic or wilderness landscape character. The historic and present day character of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River landscape is described below.

Currently, the Hellgate Recreational Section has numerous paved, two-lane roads, more than 180-private residences, farms and orchards, and numerous recreation facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas and boat landings.

Andersons Mine - 1900s - Rogue River, Oregon
from Josephine County Historical Society

Historically, this section of the Rogue River was extensively modified by mining and logging. Forest vegetation was widely spaced, with very little brush. In addition to human activities, such as logging and mining that disturbed forest vegetation, wind storms, fires and insect infestations thinned the forest vegetation, creating an open, park-like appearance along the Rogue River.

Approximately 90-years of fire exclusion have altered the landscape, as compared to natural, ecological changes that would have occurred if wildfires and repetitive underburning would have continued. The existing characteristic landscape is not ecologically sustainable and additionally, it poses a severe fire threat. A comparison of historic and recent photographs shows the difference in vegetation densities, and the differences in natural vegetative patterns of open, park-like stands, compared to dense, jungle-like forests with existing wildland fuel conditions.

The characteristic landscape is a rich diversity of scenic elements. The character of the landscape is a mosaic of colors, textures, lines and forms, created by the diversity of mountainous terrain, mixed conifer and hardwood vegetation, punctuated by serpentine and basalt rock outcrops. Waterforms include numerous small streams feeding into the Rogue River, which twists its way through dark gray basalt rock cliffs and along tan and gray gravel- and sand-bars. Light- and medium-green hardwoods of white oak, tan oak and madrone grow in patches, intermixed with stands of dark-green conifers, such as Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine and sugar pine. Light green brushfields with buckbrush, poison oak, live oak and chinquapin oak are scattered in patches across the steep topography. Closer to the river and along mountain streams, riparian vegetation is predominantly green blackberries, poison oak and gray-green willows, with scattered occurrences of native Pacific dogwood and orchard trees, adding seasonal color of white and pink flowers in spring.

Recreationists view the corridor from numerous recreation sites, the river surface, sand- and gravel-bars and paved roads. The Merlin-Galice Road, a part of the Galice-Hellgate National Back Country Byway, parallels the river in the Dunn Reach and is the primary public access to Josephine County and BLM lands. There are a number of developed and primitive camp areas and day-use sites, plus numerous trails and boat landings.

Distance zones of visibility for the entire study area are foreground/middleground. Foreground/middleground is the area that can be seen from each travel route, use area and the river for a distance of 3 to 5 miles, based on topographic screening. Because the Rogue River is incised in steep mountainous terrain with axial views both upriver and downriver, all of the study area is located within the foreground/middleground distance zone as viewed from the River and from nearby roads.

Within the 8,657-acre study area, approximately 83% is mapped as “seen areas” and 17% is mapped as “seldom seen areas.” Seen areas/seldom seen areas were delineated based upon topographic screening, not vegetative screening, because the opacity/transparency of vegetation, and therefore its screening ability, can change due to human activities such

as fuels treatment or timber harvesting, or due to natural occurrences such as wildfire, insect infestation or wind-storm damage. See Figure ***xxx***.

Because of distinctions in recreational use and opportunities, the 27-mile Hellgate Recreational stretch of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River is divided into two reaches – the Applegate Reach and the Dunn Reach (RAMP-2003).

Applegate Reach

In the Applegate Reach (12.8 miles), the river has a gradient of about 7 feet per mile and the channel averages approximately 400 feet wide. It is essentially flat to rolling terrain with the river meandering through an alluvial plain. There are scattered groves of cottonwood trees with light brown trunks, plus willow, ash and alder trees with dark gray and light gray tree trunks. Lush green willows and blackberries line the riverbanks and streams, creating a soft visual texture of deciduous vegetation reflected on smooth, flat waters of the Rogue. The surrounded landscape consists primarily of even-textured, tan and green agricultural fields on the floodplains, with a backdrop of mixed conifer (Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine) forests on rolling hills, creating partial enclosure of the view.

Visual Landforms

The serpentine river has created meanders, oxbows and large floodplains in the flatter terrain. It is incised in riverbanks that are 10' to 15' high on each side of the river, creating topographic screening for the relatively flat landforms above the river. Foothills and mountains create containment beyond these flats. Slopes are predominantly from 0% to 30%, with pitches from 31% to 50%, and scattered occurrences of rock cliffs with slopes as steep as 200%.

Visual Rockforms

Rockforms are primarily river cobble, ranging in size from a few inches to a few feet in diameter. Riverine cobble has been deposited in river bends and along sand- and gravel-bars. In a few areas, riffles are created by underwater boulders that protrude from the river's surface.

Rogue River - Glass Plate Photo - 1800s
From Josephine County Historical Society

Historic Vegetation

Scattered cottonwood, willow, pine and alder trees lined the banks. Agricultural fields created a smooth texture of light brown, tilled soil in winter and verdant fields of crops in the summer. Middleground and background mountains had sparse tree cover, remnants of logging.

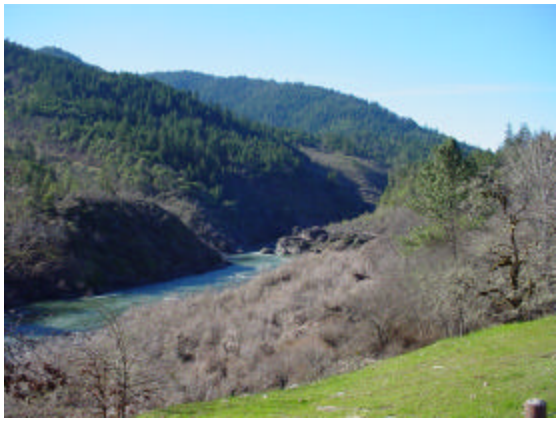
Present-Day Vegetation

As compared to historic landscapes, vegetation is denser and riverine trees are larger and taller. Vegetation remains growing in dense groves that line the banks. Beyond the riverbank, agricultural fields are visually the same as historic vegetation in the area. Middleground and background mountains are more densely covered with conifers, hardwoods and brushfields.

Further downriver, approaching Hog Creek, the terrain becomes steeper and more angular. Light green woodlands of cottonwood, ash and alder transition into darker green conifer forests, with their medium to coarse texture of vegetation. The river has more turbulent waterforms, with large boulders protruding from the river, and with cobbles and boulders becoming more common at large sand- and gravel-bars.

Dunn Reach

Entering the Dunn Reach, the Rogue has carved its way through a narrow canyon called Hellgate, with near-vertical, dark gray basalt bluffs almost completely devoid of vegetation. The horizontal form of the river contrasts with the near-vertical bluffs that contain the twisting, narrow, tumultuous Rogue River. Hellgate, with its vertical relief and complete enclosure of the view, creates a dramatic portal as people raft or boat from the Applegate to the Dunn Reach.



Below Hellgate, the landscape opens up to long vistas of dense forests on steep, rugged mountain slopes in the middleground and background. In the Dunn Reach (14.5 miles), the river is steeper and faster. It has a gradient of approximately 10 feet per mile and narrows to approximately 200 feet in width, creating more white-water rapids. The forest vegetative character augments steep terrain to provide a vertical edge and spatial enclosure at the river. Concentrated areas of hardwoods (tan oak, white oak, and madrone) with adjacent dense conifer stands (Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, sugar pine) and contrasting barren serpentine rock outcrops create an interesting, scenic mosaic of forms, lines, colors and textures. Soft textures and rounded lines of gray-green tan oak/live oak hardwood forests, next to coarse textured, dark green Douglas-fir/mixed evergreen forests, create visual diversity and interest. The occasional intrusions of serpentine rocks and soils in the lush forested landscape create a contrast of smooth and coarse textures. Waterforms are a series of flat-water pools punctuated by whitewater rapids, with numerous large gray boulders protruding from the river and lining the banks.

Visual Landforms

The serpentine river has carved a circuitous, twisting route through the steep, mountainous terrain. Slopes are predominantly from 51% to 200%, with small, scattered occurrences of 31 to 50% slopes. Along the river, there are small, scattered flats with deposits at sand- and gravel-bars, and benches with slopes ranging from 0% to 30%. These flats and benches form visual relief from the steep mountainsides and cliffs that visually dominate and contain the view.

Visual Rockform

In-river rockforms typically are large boulders that jut up out of the river, creating whitewater rapids and spectacular scenic quality. Other rockforms include gravel-bars, basalt boulders and cliffs along the river, plus large outcrops of bare serpentine rock outcrops on mountain slopes.

Pre-Historic Vegetation

Vegetation used to be more open, with park-like stands of trees that were created by frequent under-burning by Native Americans. As hunter-gatherers, native peoples knew that forests cleared with fire made it easier to traverse, hunt and gather. *"Takelma Indians in Oregon set fires in the mountain forests around the Rogue River to facilitate the driving of game." "Wherever Indians gathered acorns, especially in California and Oregon, they cleared with fire. This kept oak woodlands open and productive." "Indians who lived in the coastal mountains sometimes set their fires before gathering the acorns to roast them where they lay." "The trees [tanoak] are better if they are scorched by fire each year because burning kills disease and pests and it leaves the ground underneath the trees bare and clean and it is easier to pick up the acorns." (Bonnicksen, 2000. "America's Ancient Forests: From the Ice Age to the Age of Discovery," John Wiley & Sons.)*

Historic Vegetation

Subsequent to that era, gold mining, logging, human-caused and lightning-ignited fires have continued to alter vegetation patterns. Additionally, "the Columbus Day gale of 1962 produced wind velocities that had not been experienced in Josephine County since half of the marketable timber was blown down in 1892." (*Sutton, "110 Years With Josephine County, The History of Josephine County – 1856 to 1966"*).

Old Channel Mine, Galice Oregon - 1900s
From Josephine County Historical Society

Historic photos show that vegetation, both trees and shrubs, were widely scattered, giving an open, park-like feeling to the forest. Therefore, the ability to see through the forest, its transparency, was greater historically and when Congress designated the Rogue as a Wild and Scenic River in 1968. (This photograph, taken in Montana in 1909, may resemble the landscapes of the Rogue River in historic times.) *(Smith & Arno. 1999. "Eighty-Eight Years of Change in a Managed Ponderosa Pine Forest.")*

This photo of old mining claim buildings, located at the present-day site of the Chair Recreation Site, shows more widely spaced vegetation in the forest and along the river.

Present Day Vegetation

Crowded, overgrown vegetation provides dense visual screening and the forest is very opaque. Forests of thick vegetation, dark green, mixed conifer trees and thick groves of gray-green hardwood trees and brush, completely cover the mountainsides, except at scattered serpentine outcrops and steep basalt bluffs. The forested mountainsides and decades of fire exclusion have created unnaturally dense forests. The dense growth of trees and shrubs has limited visibility through the forest, creating a jungle-like appearance of black and gray tree trunks, dark green tree canopies, low branches, fallen trees, thick brush and forest litter on the ground. Therefore, the forest is less transparent now (2003) than it was when Congress designated the Rogue as a Wild and Scenic River (1968), and much less transparent than historic landscapes.

"Osborne" Photos

Following are excerpts from *"Steve Peak: 1933 and 1995 – What Has Fire Suppression Done?" Between 1933 and 1935, the Forest Service took 813 "Osborne" photographs from fire lookouts across Washington and Oregon. The Osborne, named after designer W. B. Osborne, was a combination transit and camera, able to take 360-degree photos – photos providing full-circle views. Currently, a project is underway to take photos from the same sites from which the original Osbornes were taken. When these retakes are compared to the originals, change in the landscape from the mid-1930s to the present will become more apparent. Vince Randall is working on the Osborne retakes for the Siskiyou National Forest and BLM. Randall feels that major impacts on forests have not come primarily from high-profile activity such as road-building and clearcuts, but rather "have come subtly through fire exclusion." This has allowed the proliferation of an*

understory so dense and conifer overstocking so pronounced, that "You can't get off the trail today. Randall also feels that the Osborne retakes show an expanding forest. Where fire has been kept out of the system, the forest has expanded. Along ridges previously open, forests now spread. Through it all – settlement, management, fire exclusion – Randall sees a forest of pronounced vigor." McKinley & Frank, 1996. "Stories on the Land: An Environmental History of the Applegate and Upper Illinois Valleys." Joint BLM & FS publication.

Insert 1933 Osborne here

Insert 1995 Randall retake here

Public Preferences for Visual Resources

Research results indicate the public prefers "managed" or "fuel treated" landscapes to untreated landscape or intensely burned landscapes *(Scott, 1998. Fuel Reduction in Residential and Scenic Forests: a Comparison of Three Treatments in a Western Montana Ponderosa Pine Stand."*

"Fire damage to forest stands immediately reduces the scenic beauty of the area, the magnitude of the impact depending on the severity of the fire and the level and timing of recovery. Prescribed burns were found to negatively impact scenic beauty in the short-term, but with ground vegetation recovery, prescribed burns can enhance scenic beauty after a few years. This is primarily due to the elimination of slash after harvest or increasing visual penetration through reducing understory density. More severe prescribed burns may decrease scenic beauty, since they may leave visible scars." (Rosenberger, 1998. "Assessing Forest Scenic Beauty Impacts of Insects and Management." USDA FS.)

3.3.1A.2 VISUAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Visual Effects Common to All Alternatives

All proposed activities would be designed, planned, implemented and monitored to protect and enhance the natural scenic quality (an outstandingly remarkable value, or ORV) and character of the landscape within the Hellgate Recreational Section of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River, and are designed to meet VRM Class I objectives.

Effects Common to All Action Alternatives

Landform – No change.
Rockform – No change.
Waterform – No change.

Vegetation

- Vegetative screening of structures, per BLM scenic easements and State Scenic Waterways Act requirements and objectives, would be safeguarded to protect, restore, or enhance the scenic view of the landscape as seen from upon or directly adjacent to the river or the backcountry byway,.
- Re-creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, reduce forest opacity, move toward a similarity to historic landscape conditions and restore natural scenic quality (ORV).
- In seen areas, percentage limitations on crown canopy changes would limit effects on natural scenic quality (ORV) so that the level of change to the characteristic landscape would be very low and would not attract attention.
- Phased treatments and multiple entries with minimal crown canopy changes during each entry, spaced approximately two- to three-years apart in seen areas, would gradually create open, park-like stand of trees. This would gradually decrease forest opacity and increase forest transparency. Color contrasts created in one phase would be greened-up before another phase, so minimal visual contrast would be created during any phase.
- The fifty-foot (50') strip of vegetation left untouched next to the Rogue River and along certain recreation roads – the Merlin-Galice Road, Robertson Bridge Road and Lower River Road – would help visually screen ground disturbance activities.
- Directional falling of trees would lessen damage to the remaining trees and shrubs (residual stand), and thereby, reduce visual impacts.
- In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore, would have no short term or long term visual effect.
- Project design features (PDFs) for other resources aid visual resources, e.g., un-entered patches of 1/10th- to 3-acres would be scattered throughout the project area to maintain diversity and for wildlife habitat. Dense thickets of trees would be thinned to density levels that would improve stand growth and individual tree vigor. Larger hardwoods and scattered large conifer trees would be reserved for the future large-stand growth component. Stream buffers and sensitive plant zones would remain

untouched. These PDFs would create a natural mosaic of visual diversity and have a positive effect on natural scenic quality (ORV).

Summary of Effects That Would Vary By Alternative

Vegetation – Vegetative response would change by alternative.

Under Alternative 1, No Action, vegetation would not be changed, altered or managed, and the existing character of the landscape and the over-stocked vegetation density of the forest would remain. Visibility through the forest would continue to be limited by the dense vegetation, and opacity of the forest would continue to be dark and dense. There would be no change to the characteristic landscape.

Under Alternative 1, No Action with Fire, visual resource characteristics (form, line, color, and texture) of existing vegetative character could change dramatically, depending on fire location, intensity, timing and suppression/containment response. The level of change to the characteristic landscape could be very low and not attract attention, or it could be very high and attract much attention, depending on fire characteristics.

Under Alternative 2, crown canopy vegetation would not be altered noticeably. Overall visual effects of ground-cover disturbance would be slightly noticeable in the short term, 1- to 2-years, and negligible in the long term. Overall landscape character would not change dramatically, and existing vegetation would remain with medium-coarse textures. The level of change to the characteristic landscape would be very low and would not attract attention.

Under Alternative 3, crown canopy vegetation would be altered slightly, creating coarser textures and more open canopies in the Defense Zone and Threat Zone. Overall visual effects of ground-cover disturbance would be similar to Alternative 2. Re-creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, similar to historic landscapes. The level of change to the characteristic landscape would be low and would not attract attention.

Under Alternative 4, crown canopy vegetation would be most altered of any alternative, creating coarser visual textures with more spacing between tree crowns. Removal of large trees in the areas closest to human occupancy (CARs, WUI and Defense Zones) would have the greatest potential impacts to visual resources. Overall visual effects of ground-cover disturbance would be similar to Alternatives 2 and 3. Re-creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, similar to historic landscapes. The level of change to the characteristic landscape in the Defense Zone could be moderate and could potentially attract attention. The level of change to the characteristic landscape in the Threat Zone and General Forest Zone would be low and would not attract attention.

Detailed Description of Effects That Would Vary By Alternative

No Action Alternative

Vegetation
Under Alternative 1, No Action, vegetation would not be changed, and the existing scenic character and over-stocked vegetation density of the forest would remain. Under the No Action Alternative, natural vegetative succession would continue and the existing scenic characteristics would remain relatively unchanged. Continuation of the current "hands-off" approach to all vegetation manipulation in the river corridor would result in continued tree mortality and build-up of dead standing trees, dead and down woody material, high accumulations of fuels – brush, low-limbed trees and dense tree canopies. Visibility through the forest would continue to be limited by the dense vegetation, and opacity of the forest would continue to be dark and dense.

The Applegate Reach. The existing scenic characteristics of vegetation would remain unchanged.

The Dunn Reach. The existing scenic characteristics of vegetation would remain unchanged.

No Action Alternative with A Wildfire

Under Alternative 1, No Action with Fire, visual resource characteristics (form, line, color, and texture) of existing vegetative character could change dramatically, depending on fire location, intensity, timing and suppression/containment response. The least scenic effect would be a small, low-intensity fire that was contained quickly. Under this scenario, the fire would leave patches of blackened, standing dead trees, plus orange/red scorched and dead vegetation among a forest of living, green trees and shrubs. The remainder of vegetation in the WSR corridor would remain. Conversely, the greatest scenic effect would be a very large fire, similar to the 2002 Biscuit Fire, where large areas would be consumed, leaving blackened standing trees, and blackened mountainsides of consumed trees and brush, with some patches of unburned green vegetation.

The Applegate Reach. Under Alternative 1, No Action with Fire, only the scenic quality of vegetation would change. The overall form, line, color and texture of vegetation could change dramatically after a large wildfire. In the short term, if a wildfire were to occur in agricultural areas, with their pastures, fences, fields and meadows, the vegetative colors of greens with a mixture of tans would change to black and browns. However, because this is predominantly an agricultural area, the colors of fields and pastures would return to their original hues in the short term, within one to two years. The smooth, uniform texture of the landscape would not change in the long term. However, in nearby woodlands and forests a large wildfire would cause changes in color from greens, grays and tans to blacks and browns, plus red/orange scorched trees. Visual texture of trees and

shrubs would change from coarse to smooth. Overall, there would be minor to moderate changes to the natural scenic quality of the upper Applegate Reach after a large wildfire, depending on fire location and intensity.

If a large wildfire were to occur further down river in the Applegate Reach, removal of vegetation and vegetative screening would create changes in the short and long term. The rounded hills, which have green, coarse textured vegetative character of conifer species, would change to blackened, smooth textured hills with stark vertical, black lines and more contrasting forms of blackened, burnt trees standing on barren hillsides. The changes in form, line, color and texture would be obvious in the short and long term, lasting up to 20- or 25-years. The variety of visual hues, such as dark greens and browns would dramatically change to blacks, grays, orange/reds and whites. In addition, landscape character would drastically change from medium-coarse texture to smooth textured mountainsides with sparse or no vegetation. This change would create a long-term, adverse visual impact to the overall scenic quality of the landscape.

The Dunn Reach. Under Alternative 1 with Fire, only the scenic quality of vegetation would change. Visual effects would be similar to those described above for the lower Applegate Reach. Because of the thick vegetation on steeper slopes with longer axial views in the Dunn Reach, if a large wildfire were to occur, it would leave dramatic changes in the scenic character of the landscape. The variety of rich forest colors in this reach, such as dark- and light-greens, blacks and grays, would in the short-term, change to black, gray, red/orange and white. In the long-term, colors would eventually revert back to greens, blacks and grays within 20- to 25-years. However, forms, lines and textures of the existing dense forested landscape would not return to existing conditions for many decades.

Alternative 2 Fuel Treatment Scenario

The Applegate Reach. In the seen areas, overall form, line, color and texture of vegetation would change slightly under Alternative 2, with removal of some vegetation up to 8" DBH. Because this size of trunk is predominantly understory, there would be minimal alteration to the canopy vegetation that is visible as foreground/middleground from the Rogue River, the Merlin/Galice Road or from numerous recreation sites along the river. If Slashbuster work were to occur in the seen areas, the vegetative colors of greens and tans would change to orange/reds, tans and browns in the short term because wood chips would cover some of the land. If pile and burn or broadcast burn activities were to occur, vegetative colors would change in the short term from greens and tans to gray and brown with spots of black. However, natural colors would return quickly within one- to two-years because of the green-up effect in this agricultural area. The smooth, uniform colors and textures of the landscape would not change in the long term, with very minor changes to the natural scenic quality.

Under Alternative 2, further down river in the Applegate Reach and in seen areas, the crown canopy of existing conifer and hardwood forests would be opened only slightly,

because the 8" size class is predominantly understory trees and shrubs. This very slight reduction in canopy closure would slightly increase the coarse texture of forested slopes. Forest canopy would remain opaque, and the 50' screening of vegetation next to the river and roads, plus crown canopies further uphill would almost completely screen ground disturbances. Fuels treatment on-the-ground, covering up to 50% of the seen area, would create slight color contrasts in the short term, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, orange/reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. If burn piles or pits remained visible and noticeable after burning, these would be scattered or raked over, lessening the visual effect. Additionally, after one- or two-years of vegetation re-sprout and green-up, plus weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors and textures would return to near-original condition and landscape character. Creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, moving toward a similarity to historic landscape conditions.

Approximately two- to three-years after the first treatment, crown canopies in seen areas would be re-treated to further reduce canopy closure by another 15%. Forest opacity would be reduced and transparency of the forest canopy would be increased. However, color contrast created in phase one would be greened-up before the second entry, so very little visual contrast would be created by the second entry. From a visual resource management standpoint, the overall goal of these phased entries in the seen areas, with minimal crown disturbance each phase, is to lessen the overall scenic impact by utilizing multiple entries with minimal crown canopy treatments during each entry. Further reduction in scenic impact would occur because on-the-ground activities in Phase 2 would probably not include Slashbuster activity, but would more likely be a variety of under-burning treatments. Creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, moving toward a similarity to historic landscapes.

In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore would have no short term or long term visual effect.

Under Alternative 2, overall landscape character would not dramatically change, and existing vegetation would remain at medium-coarse textures. Implementation of Alternative 2 would not create an adverse impact to the overall scenic quality or landscape character in the Applegate Reach.

The Dunn Reach. Under Alternative 2, there would be changes to the natural scenic quality of vegetation in the short or long term. The vegetative character, which provides vertical lines, angular forms and coarse visual textures, would change slightly under Alternative 2. In seen areas, the crown canopy of existing conifer and hardwood forests would be opened slightly by removing understory trees. This reduction in canopy closure would slightly increase the coarse texture of forested slopes. In general, 50' screening of vegetation next to the river and roads, plus tree boles and crown canopies would screen ground disturbances. Fuels treatment on-the-ground would create slight color contrasts in the short term, with similar visual effects as those described above. After 1 or 2 years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material,

landscape colors would return to near-original condition. Phased entries, with similar effects to those described above, would occur.

In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore would have no short term or long term visual effect.

Overall, landscape character would not dramatically change, and existing vegetation would remain at medium-coarse textures. Implementation of Alternative 2 would not create adverse impacts to the overall scenic quality or landscape character in the Dunn Reach.

Alternative 3 – Fuel Treatment Scenario

The Applegate Reach. Under Alternative 3, the natural scenic quality of landforms, rockforms and waterforms would not change in the Applegate Reach in the short or long term. In the upper portion of the Applegate Reach, visual effects would be identical to Alternative 2.
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Further down river in the Applegate Reach, and in the seen areas, overall form, line, color and texture of vegetation would be affected, similar to Alternative 2, except that up to 20% of the existing crown canopy would be removed, thereby creating more coarse visual texture. The forest would be slightly more transparent than in Alternative 2, and more transparent than existing conditions, but in general, the 50' screening of vegetation next to the river and roads, plus tree boles and crown canopies further uphill would screen some ground disturbances. Fuels treatment on-the-ground would create color contrasts in the short term, similar to Alternative 2, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. However, after 1- or 2-years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors would return to natural greens and browns. Under Alternative 3, phased treatments of the canopy would occur approximately two years apart. Each phase would treat up to 20% of the existing crown canopy in seen areas, creating open, park-like stands of trees with greater visibility (transparency) through the forest, and reducing the existing jungle-like appearance. Creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, moving toward a similarity to historic landscapes.

In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore would have no short term or long term visual effect.

Overall landscape character would not dramatically change, and existing vegetation would remain at medium-coarse textures. Implementation of Alternative 3 would not create an adverse impact to the overall scenic quality or landscape character in the Applegate Reach.

The Dunn Reach. Under Alternative 3, the vegetative character, which provides vertical lines, angular forms and coarse textures, would change slightly. In seen areas, the crown canopy of existing conifer and hardwood forests would be opened slightly, up to 20% more canopy opening than existing. This reduction in canopy closure would slightly increase the coarse texture of forested slopes and would create more open, park-like stands of trees. Additionally, the forest canopy would be slightly more transparent, but in general, tree boles and crown canopies would screen ground disturbances. Fuels treatment on-the-ground would create color contrasts in the short term, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. If burn piles or pits remained visible and noticeable after burning, these would be scattered or raked over. After 1- or 2-years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors would return to near-original condition.

In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore would have no short term or long term visual effect.

Overall, landscape character would not dramatically change, and existing vegetation would remain at medium-coarse textures. Implementation of Alternative 3 would not create an adverse impact to the overall scenic quality or landscape character. Creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, moving toward a similarity to historic landscapes.

Alternative 4 – Fuel Treatment Scenario

The Applegate Reach. Under Alternative 4 in the upper portion of the Applegate reach, visual effects would be identical to Alternatives 2 and 3.

Further down river in the Applegate Reach and in the seen areas, overall form, line, color and texture of vegetation would be affected, similar to Alternative 3, except that up to 20% of the existing crown canopy trees would be removed in the Defense Zone, thereby creating a more coarse and open visual texture. Potentially, branches and crowns of leave-trees could be damaged due to felling trees up to 21" DBH. PDFs are designed to minimize these visual effects of felling larger trees. Under Alternative 4, vegetation would be more transparent than under Alternative 3, and much more transparent than under Alternatives 1 or 2. In most Defense Zone areas, remaining tree boles and crown canopies would only partially screen ground disturbances. Fuels treatment on-the-ground would create moderate color contrasts in the short term, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, orange/reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. If burn piles or pits remained visible and noticeable after burning, these would be scattered or raked over. After 1- or 2-years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors would return to green, natural appearing condition.

In the Threat Zone, vegetation treatment would create moderate color contrasts in the short term, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. However, after 1- or 2-years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors would return to near-original condition. In most Threat Zone areas, tree boles and crown canopies would screen ground disturbances. Under Alternative 4, phased treatments of the canopy would occur approximately two- to three-years apart. Each phase would treat up to 20% of the existing crown canopy in seen areas.

In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore would have no short term or long term visual effect.

Overall landscape character would not change dramatically, and existing vegetation would move from medium-coarse textures to more coarse and open textures. Implementation of Alternative 4 would not create an adverse impact to the overall scenic quality or landscape character in the Applegate Reach. Creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, moving toward a similarity to historic landscapes.

The Dunn Reach. Under Alternative 4 in the seen areas, overall form, line, color and texture of vegetation would be affected, similar to Alternative 3, except that up to 20% of the existing crown canopy trees would be removed in the Defense Zone, thereby creating the most coarse and open visual texture. Potentially, branches and crowns of leave-trees could be damaged due to felling trees up to 21" DBH. PDFs are designed to minimize these visual effects of felling larger trees. Under Alternative 4, vegetation would be more transparent than under Alternative 3, and much more transparent than under Alternatives 1 or 2. In most Defense Zone areas, remaining tree boles and crown canopies would only partially screen ground disturbances because of the steep slopes and greater visibility. Fuels treatment on-the-ground would create moderate to high color contrasts in the short term, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. If burn piles or pits remained visible and noticeable after burning, these would be scattered or raked over. After 1- or 2-years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors would return to green, natural appearing condition.

In the Threat Zone, vegetation manipulation would create moderate color contrasts in the short term, changing from the existing dark greens, grays and browns to tans, reds, blacks and grays, caused by a variety of fuel treatment activities. However, after 1- or 2-years of vegetation re-sprout, green-up and weathering of wood chips or burned material, landscape colors would return to near-original condition. In most Threat Zone areas, tree boles and crown canopies would screen ground disturbances. Under Alternative 4, phased treatments of the canopy would occur approximately two- to three-years apart. Each phase would treat up to 20% of the existing crown canopy in seen areas.

In seldom seen areas, fuel treatment activities would not be visible, and therefore would have no short- or long-term visual effect.

Overall landscape character would not dramatically change, and existing vegetation would move from medium-coarse textures to more coarse and open textures. Implementation of Alternative 4 would not create an adverse impact to the overall scenic quality or landscape character. Creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, moving toward a similarity to historic landscapes.

Cumulative Effects

Within the viewshed of the Rogue River, yet outside the WSR boundary, there are several timber sale areas that are visible from the Rogue River, Merlin-Galice Road, Lower River Road, Robertson Bridge Road and various recreation sites in the corridor. Examples are Picket Charge, Maple Syrup and Straton Hog Timber Sales. These timber sales have been designed and planned by the BLM to meet VRM Class II, where visual changes are evident, but do not attract attention. VRM Class II is the appropriate VRM Class outside the Wild and Scenic River Corridor.

The Straton Hog Timber Sale is already logged, and there were no adverse effects to the visual resources. In the center of the photo to the left, a logging helicopter is visible just below the ridgeline, but the harvest unit is not noticeable. Implementation of these other timber sales will be similar, and will not have an adverse cumulative visual impact on the Rogue WSR.

VRM Summary/Conclusions

In all action alternatives, re-creation of open, park-like stands of trees would increase forest transparency, similar to historic landscapes.

In Alternatives 2 and 3, because of the effectiveness of Project Design Features and considering the existing diversity of landscapes within the RNWSR corridor, impacts to visual resources would be minimal. Areas treated would meet VRM Class I objectives, and added to untreated areas that are left for biological and watershed buffers, would add to scenic diversity and natural scenic quality (ORV). Phased implementation in seen areas would further lessen psychological impacts to changes in natural scenic quality (ORV).

In Alternative 4, removal of large trees in the areas closest to human occupancy (CARs, WUI and Defense Zones) would have the greatest potential impacts to visual resources. The level of change to the characteristic landscape in the Defense Zone could be moderate and could potentially attract attention. The level of change to the characteristic landscape in the Threat Zone and General Forest Zone would be low and would not attract attention.